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THE
DEATH-SONG

OF

RAGNAR LODBRACH, OR LODBROG,

K

KING OF DENMARK.

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN OF

O L A U S W O R M I U S,

By H U G H D O W N M A N, M.D.

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DEATH-SON

RAGNAR LOGBRACH, OR LOGBROG

KING OF DENMARK

OF A US W O R M I U S

BY HUGH DOWMAN, M.D.



T H E F A B L E

RAGNAR LODBRACH flourished in the eighth century, and by his naval expeditions (according to the custom of his countrymen) rendered himself the terror of the northern parts of Europe. After having carried on his depredations with success for many years, he was at length taken prisoner by Ella, King of Northumberland, whose coasts he had invaded, and put to death by him, being (as was reported) cast into a dungeon full of serpents. His melancholy fate stimulated his Son Ivar to avenge it; and on this occasion the famous standard of the Raven is said to have been embroidered by his sisters, and consecrated with such magic rites, as insured victory to those before whom it was borne. Under this standard Ivar made a descent on the territories of Ella, fought with, vanquished, and put him to death in his turn.

The following Poem, if we may credit tradition, was composed by Ragnar, in his horrid place of confinement. It is apparent, however, that it must have been the work of some Scald or Bard, probably to do honour to the memory of his deceased King, to place before the eyes of his subjects his heroic achievements, and urge them and his Son, (or Sons, according to the Poem itself) to revenge.

It is preserved by Olaus Wormius in his book de *Literaturâ Runicâ*. His is a literal translation in Latin, which I shall subjoin to the English Version. While the frequent return of the same images and expressions shews the Author's

thor's unacquaintance with the nicer rules of composition, he exhibits a species of savage greatness, a fierce and wild kind of sublimity, and a noble contempt of danger and death.

An account of the original Runic, and particular construction of the verse, the harmony of which did not depend on rhyme, but on the number of corresponding syllables, and disposition of letters, may be seen in Olaus Wormius's Appendix. The Reader is referred likewise to Dr. Blair's Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian. If for no other reason, this Epicedium is valuable, as it doubtless affords a lively picture of the manners and sentiments of the northern nations.

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T H E

DEATH-SONG

O F

RAGNAR LODBRACH.

I.
WITH our sword's refitless might

We have thinn'd the ranks of fight.

In early life, his volum'd train

The crested serpent roll'd in vain.

Thora's charms, the matchless prize ;

Gothland saw my fame arise.

Thronging crouds the monster scan,

Shouts applausive hail me Man.

B

All

All his fierceness prompt to try,

The shaggy vestment cloath'd my thigh ;

Soon transfierced, in death he lay,

My falchion smote for splendid pay.

I.

Pugnavimus ensibus

Haud post longum tempus

Cum in Gotlandia accessimus

Ad serpentis immensi necem

Tunc impetravimus Thoram

Ex hoc vocarunt me virum

Quod serpentem transfodi

Hirsutam braccam ob illam coedem

* From this first exploit, (as the story goes) Ragnar obtained his surname of Lodbrach or Hair-Feet. For the King of Gothland having promised his daughter Thora, to the man who should kill a vast serpent which wasted the country ; Ragnar undertook the enterprise. And dressing himself in the skins of beasts, with the hairy side outmost, threw water over them ; the cold, to which he purposely exposed himself, forming round him a suit (as it were) of frozen armour. He met the serpent, whose teeth had no effect on this impenetrable mail, fixed him to the ground with his spear, and ripping him up with his sword, tore out his heart. After the victory the King presented him his daughter, and, on account of his rough dress, gave him the name above mentioned, by which he was from that time distinguished.

Olaus Magnus relates this adventure, but says, he fought with, and killed two snakes. That the King had taken them when young, and bred them up as a guard for his daughter ; but as they increased in size they became a public terror, and poisoned the country.

Such is the fabulous beginning attributed by bards and historians to the actions of Ragnar Lodbrach. Such a hero could not first appear on the stage in the common way. St. George and the Dragon, and Hercules strangling two snakes, while in his cradle, naturally arise to the mind. In more obscure and early ages, the romantic hath always been mixed with the true. The subsequent adventures of Ragnar, seem however better founded, and carry no marks of fable till we come to the last scene, when the manner of his death is as wonderful and incredible as his first appearance.

Cuspide ictum intuli in colubrum

Ferro lucidorum stipendiorum.

II.

Still a youth, we steer our course *,

T'ward the morning's distant source;

Through the vast Oreonic flood

Torrents run of crimson blood.

The yellow-footed bird we feast,

Plenty fills the ravenous beast.

Our steel-struck helms sublime resound,

The sea is all one bleeding wound.

Our foes lie weltering on the shore,

Deep the raven wades in gore.

II.

Multum Juvenis fui quando acquisivimus

Orientem versus in Oreonico freto

Vulnerum amnes avidæ feræ

Et flavipedi avi

Accepimus ibidem tonuerunt

According to Claus Wormius, every stanza began with the words
Pugnativimus ensibus
We have fought with swords.

Ad sublimis galeas

Dura ferra magnam escam

Omnis erat oceanus vulnus

Vadavit corvus in sanguine caesorum.

III. I ward the morning towers;

Crown'd with twenty rolling years,

High we raise our glittering spears,

And deeds of glorious worth display,

Wherever shines the lamp of day.

Still we the trembling east appall,

Eight mighty chiefs at Dimen fall.

We scorn with mean and niggard food,

To treat the generous eagle brood.

The wound its ruddy sweat distills,

The gaping ocean carnage fills.

Their host is struck with dire dismay,

Its strength of years dissolves away.

III.

Alte tulimus tunc lanceas

Quando viginti annos numeravimus

Et celebrem laudem comparavimus passim

Vicimus octo barones

In

In oriente ante Divini portum
 Aquilæ impetravimus tunc sufficientem
 Hospitii sumptum in illa strage
 Sudor decidit in vulnere
 Oceano perdidit exercitus aetatem.

IV.

War and death terrific lower,
 When th' Helsingians brave our power;
 We urge them down the gloomy reach,
 They throng t'ward Odin's dark abode
 The Vistula beheld our course,
 Our navy stem its rapid force;
 The biting sword descended steep,
 One wound extensive glow'd the deep
 Its shores the reeking current dy'd,
 Our falchions mock'd their armour's pride,
 With echoing voices roar'd amain,
 And cleft their stubborn shields in twain.

V.

Pugnæ facta copia
 Cum Helsingianis postulavimus
 Ad aulam Odini

Naves direximus in ostium visulae

Mucro potuit tum mordere

Omnis erat vulnus unda

Terra rubefacta calido

Fredebat gladius in loricas

Gladius findebat clypeos.

V.

No warrior droop'd, no warrior fled,

Till on the deck Heraudus bled.

A braver chief, to distant lands,

Ne'er guided his victorious bands.

Ne'er beheld a chief more brave

His ships of battle plough the wave,

His heart impell'd by conscious might,

With eager transport fought the fight.

V.

Memini neminem tunc fugisse

Priusquam in navibus

Heraudus in bello caderet.

Non findit navibus

Alius baro praestantior

Mare ad portum

In navibus longis post illum

Sic attulit princeps passim

Alacre in bellum cor.

IV

VI

Their shields aside each warrior threw :

The spear on rapid pinion flew ;

Heroes its deadly speed confest,

It quiver'd in the dauntless breast.

With hunger keen the trenchant sword

Wide the Scarfian rocks engor'd.

His shield became of purple grain

E'er Rafno fell, the king of men.

From every helm-encircled crown,

The blood-warm sweat in streams ran down.

IV

Exercitus abiecit clypeos

Cum hasta volavit

Ardua ad virorum pectora

Momordit Scarforum cautes

Gladius in pugna

Sanguineus erat clypeus

Antequam Rafno rex caderet

Fluxit ex virorum capitibus
Calidus in loricas sudor.

VII.

Round th' Indirian isles that day
The crows were surfeited with prey.
There the wild beast inglutted food,
For plenteous was the feast of blood.
All fought as one, no single name
Claim'd the distinguish'd mark of fame.
When first appear'd day's flaming star
I saw the piercing darts of war,
The barbed arrows took their flight
When first he streak'd the east with light.

VII.

Habere potuerunt tum corvi
Ante Indirorum insulas
Sufficientem prædam dilaniandam
Acquisivimus feris carnivoris
Plenum prandium unico actu
Difficile erat unius facere mentionem
Oriente sole

Spicula vidi pungere
Propulerunt arcus ex se ferra.

VIII.

Our swords loud-bellow'd o'er the slain
Till Eiflin fell on Laneo's plain.
Thence enrich'd with golden spoil
War to our routed foemen's foil.
We bring: where helmets throng'd the field,
The falchion cut the pictured shield;
Their necks deep-pierced, with must abound,
It flows their cloven brains around.

VIII.

Altum mugierunt enses
Antequam in Laneo campo
Eiflinus rex cecidit
Processimus auro ditati
Ad terram prostratorum dimicandum
Gladius secuit Clypeorum
Picturas in galearum conventu
Cervicum mustum ex vulneribus
Diffusum per cerebrum fissum.

IX.

Drench'd in blood our shields we rear, .

The oil of blood anoints our spear.

In the Boringholmian bay

Making its quick tempestuous way,

The cloud of darts was onward borne,

Our targets were in sunder torn.

The bows their iron shower expel,

In the fierce conflict Volnir fell.

No king on earth could him exceed,

In valour and heroic deed.

Wide o'er the land the slaughter'd lay,

The howling beasts embrac'd their prey.

IX.

Tenuimus clypeos in sanguine

Cum hastam unximus

Ante Boringholmum

Telorum nubes disrumpunt clypeum

Extrufit arcus ex fe-metallum

Volnir cecidit in conflictu

Non erat illo rex major

Cæsi dispersi late per littora

Feræ amplectebantur escam.

X.

The battle rag'd with heightened lust,

E'er princely Freyer bit the dust.

His breast-plate's golden mail of yore

The hard blue sword, insteep'd in gore,

Conflicting with our warrior host,

Had hewn upon the Flandrian coast.

The virgin struck with woe appears

When she that morning's carnage hears;

A copious banquet we had given

To the fierce wolf, and birds of heaven.

X.

Pugna manifeste crescebat

Antequam Freyr rex caderet

In Flandrorum terra

Cœpit cœruleus ad incidendum

Sanguine illitus in auream

Loricam in pugna

Durus armorum mucro olim

Virgo deploravit matutinam laniam
 Multa præda dabatur feris.

XI.

Gasping in death these eyes survey'd,
 An hundred times an hundred laid.
 In haste we sail'd, a dreadful band,
 To combat on Ænglane's land;
 Six following days the rising sun
 Beheld the strife of swords begun,
 And six succeeding evenings close,
 Till prostrate fall our vanquish'd foes.
 Urg'd by our steel to sink in fight,
 Valdiofur confess'd its might.

XI.

Centies centenos vidi jacere
 In navibus
 Ubi Ænglanes vocatur
 Navigavimus ad pugnam
 Per sex dies antequam exercitus caderet
 Transegimus mucronum missam
 In exortu solis
 Coactus est pro nostris Gladius
 Veldiofur in bello occumbere.

XII.

The rain of blood our falchions pour,
 It smokes on Bardafyrdea's shore.
 Doom'd to the hawks a pallid croud,
 The murmuring firing was twang'd aloud.
 Then where in Odin's deathful fight
 The greedy sword, with eager bite,
 Devour'd the cuirass, there the bow,
 The casque, the motion swiftly flow,
 The bow with poison sharp to wound,
 With sanguine sweat bespinkled round.

XII.

Ruit pluvia sanguinis de gladiis
 Præcep̃s in Bardafyrde
 Pallidum corpus pro accipitribus
 Murmuravit arcus ubi iuuere
 Acriter mordebat loricas
 In conflictu
 Odini pileus Galea
 Cuccurrit arcus ad vulnus
 Venenate acutus confusus sudore sanguineo.

XIII.

The sport of war intent to try,
 We rear our magic shields on high.
 In Hiadningia's echoing bay
 First began th' heroic play.
 The vengeful swords whirl'd o'er the main
 Their strong-knit bucklers tear in twain
 With mingled clash our arms resound,
 The helms of men to dust are ground.
 Not with more transport by his side
 The lover clasps his beauteous bride.

XIII.

Tenuimus magica scuta
 Alte in pugnae ludo
 Ante Hiadningum sinum
 Videre licuit tum viros
 Qui gladiis lacerarunt clypeos
 In gladiatorio murmure
 Galeæ attritæ virorum
 Erat sicut splendidam virginem
 In lecto juxta se collocare.

XIV.

XIV.

The thick-rai'd storm our shields defy;
 In Northumbria's land they lye,
 Their gory carcases bestrew
 The soil, and taint the morning dew.
 Routed they fled with wild dismay,
 Their boasted warriors dar'd not stay,
 Where the sword with grim delight
 Their helmets polish'd plains would bite.
 The genial bed such rapture warms,
 Blest with the youthful widow's charms.

XIV.

Dura venit tempestas clypeis
 Cadaver cecidit in terram
 In Nortumbria
 Erat circa matulinum tempus
 Hominibus necessum erat fugere
 Ex praelio ubi acute
 Cassidis campos mordebant gladii
 Erat hoc veluti Juvenem viduam
 In primaria sede osculari.

XV.

XV.

Herthiofe escap'd our force,
 And widely sped his prosperous course,
 Where with rude rocks against the skies
 The southern Orcades arise.
 While He who gave Us, to display,
 And shine in victory's bright array,
 Rogvald, our glory and our pride,
 Compell'd by fate's stern mandate died.
 Plung'd in the storm of arms He fell;
 Then mourn'd the Hawks with shrieking yell
 For dreadful in the sport of war,
 The darts of blood He hurl'd afar;
 The sword of blood He well could wield,
 The shatter'd helms bestrew'd the field.

XV.

Herthiofe evant fortunatus
 In Australibus Orcadibus ipse
 Victoria in nostris hominibus
 Cogebatur in armorum mimbo
 Rogvaldus occumbere
 Iste venit summus super accipitres
 Luctus in gladiatorum ludo

Strenue jactabat concussor

Galeæ sanguinis teli.

XVI.

Heaps pil'd on heaps the warriors lye,

The Hawk looks down with joyous eye,

The pastime sees, and clotted gore,

Envyng the eagle, nor the boar.

Together rush the shield and sword,

Then fell Irlandia's haughty Lord

Marstan; He floats in Vedra's bay,

The hungry Raven's destined prey.

XVI.

Quilibet jacebat transversum supra alium

Gaudebat pugna lætus

Accipiter ob gladiatorum ludum.

Non fecit aquilam aut aprum

Qui Irlandiam gubernavit

Conventus fiebat ferri & clypei

Marstanus rex jejunis

Fiebat in Vedræ sinu

Præda data corvis.

XVII.

Amid the weapons strifeſul ſcorn,
 Many a Hero in the morn
 Of life and glory preſs'd the plain.
 My ſon mature in fame was ſlain,
 Ripe in renown the duſt He preſs'd,
 The griding falchion rived his breaſt,
 By Egill, dauntleſs Agner dies,
 He rends his arms, the victor's prize:
 In Hamduſ' corſelet ſounds the lance,
 Red lightnings from the ſtandards glance.

XVII.

Bellatorem multum vidi cadere
 Mane ante machæram
 Virum in mucronum diſſidio
 Filio meo incidit mature
 Gladius juxta cor
 Egillus fecit Agnerum ſpoliatum
 Imperterritum virum vita
 Sonuit lancea prope Hamdi
 Grifeam loricaſ ſplendebant vexilla.

XVIII.

Sparing of words, the brave I view;
 Their foes they prodigally slew,
 Thrown to the wolves; th' Endilian flood
 For seven whole days was stain'd with blood.
 So looks the wine our hand-maids bear;
 Died deep the impurpled ships appear.
 The falchion raging mid th' alarms,
 And hoarse tumultuous din of arms,
 Gash'd many a mailed cuirass bright,
 In Scioldungia's fatal fight.

XVIII.

Verborum tenaces vidi diffecare
 Haut minutim pro lupis
 Endili maris ensibus
 Erat per Hebdomadæ spatium
 Quasi mulieres vinum apportarent
 Rubefactæ erant naves
 Valde in strepitu armorum
 Sciffa erat lorica
 In Scioldungorum prælio.

XIX.

I saw the widow's darling joy,
 I saw the virgin's fair-hair'd boy,
 Saw them in morning beauty gay,
 Saw set in death their youthful ray.
 Warm with many a glowing stream
 Her ruddy billows gleam.
 As by circling nymphs supplied,
 The fervid bath, in copious tide,
 From the vine's nectareous hoard
 Floats around the social board.
 Ere Orn expir'd, with frequent stroke,
 I saw his blood-stain'd buckler broke;
 By strong necessity controul'd,
 Inverted life forsakes the bold.

XIX.

Pulchricomum vidi crepusculascere
 Virginis amatorem circa matutinum
 Et confabulationis amicum viduarum
 Erat sicut calidum balneum
 Vinei vasis nymphea portaret
 Nos in Ilœ freto
 Antequam Orn rex caderet

Sanguineum

Sanguineum clypeum vidi ruptum

Hoc invertit virorum vitam.

XX.

The game of slaughtering swords, we haste,
Where Lind frowns o'er the watery waste,
With three contending Kings to try
How few escape & rejoic'd to fly
The wild beasts gnarring throng the strand,
The hawk and wolf commingled stand,
Tear them with goading hunger's fire,
Nor till with carnage cramm'd, retire.
While fierce we smote, th' Hybernian's blood,
With copious torrents swell'd the flood.

XX.

Egimus gladiatorum ad coedem

Ludum in Lindis insula.

Cum regibus tribus.

Pauci potuerunt inde loetari.

Cecidit multus in rictum ferarum.

Accipiter dilaniavit carnem cum lupo.

Ut fatur inde discederet.

Hybernorum sanguis in oceanum.

Copiose decidit per mactationis tempus.

XXI.

XXI.

The steel's sharp fang, and bite severe
The buckler prov'd; the whizzing spear,
Speeding to its direction true,
The breast-plate chafed of golden hue.
Onlugs will mark for many an age
The traces of that battle's rage,
There march'd the Kings with eager feet
Intent the sport of swords to meet.
The crimson'd isle, on all its coast
Saw the red-foaming billows tost
Or from the desperate fight rebounds,
A flying dragon full of wounds.

XXI.

Alte gladius mordebat clypeos
Tunc cum aurei coloris
Hasta fricabat loricas
Videre licuit in Onlugs insula
Per secula multum post
Ibi fuit ad gladiatorum ludos.
Reges processerunt.

Rubicundum

Rubicundum erat circa insulam

An volans draco vulnerum.

XXII.

The brave with ardour yield their breath,
Nor heed the sure approach of death;
The thought of death their bosom warms,
They meet it in the storm of arms,
He oft deplores this fickle state,
Who never dar'd the frowns of fate.
Lured by the cheek of pallid fear
The joyful eagle hovers near.

The coward to himself a pest,
Forbids the shield to guard his breast.

XXII.

Quid est viro forti morte certius

Etsi ipse in armorum nimbo

Adversus collocatus sit

Sæpe deplorat ætatem

Qui nunquam premitur

Malum ferunt timidum incitare

Aquilam ad gladium ludum

Meticulosus venit nuspium

Cordi suo usui.

XXX.

This I establish just and right,

That hurrying on to closest fight,

Youth against youth, with fervent heat,

Should rush, nor man from man retreat.

Long time was this the Hero's pride;

And all who by the virgin's side

Aspire to lye, and taste her charms,

Should nobly stem the roar of arms.

XXXI.

Hoc numero æquum ut procedat

In contactu gladiatorum

Juvenis unus contra alterum

Non retrocedat vir a viro

Hoc fuit viri fortis nobilitas diu

Semper debet amoris amicus virginum

Audax esse in fremitu armorum.

XXIV.

Doubtless the fates our actions lead,

Beyond their limits none can tread.

Little of yore did I foresee,
 That Ella would my death decree;
 When half-expiring with my wound,
 Anxious I threw my garb around;
 Conceal'd it from the warrior train,
 And launch'd my vessels on the main:
 Then over all the Scotian flood
 We gave the beasts of prey their food.

XXIV.

Hoc videtur mihi re vera

Quod fata sequimur

Rarus transgreditur fata Pascatum H

Non destinavi Ellæ

De vitæ exitu meæ

Cum ego sanguinem semi-mortuus tegerem,

Et naves in aquas protrusi

Passim impetramus tuæ feris

Escam in Scotiæ finibus

XXV.

Hence springing in my thoughtful mind,

A never-failing joy I find;

E

For

For well I know, superbly graced,
 For me the lofty feat is placed,
 For me the generous mead shall foam
 In father Balder's festal dome;
 From goblets pour'd its copious tide
 By skulls of recreant foes supplied.
 The brave shall ne'er lament their death
 In Odin's splendid courts beneath;
 No clamours vain I flatter bear,
 No sickly murmurs of despair.

XXV.

Hoc videre me facit semper
 Quod Balderi patris scamna
 Parata scio in aula
 Bibemus cervice brevis
 Ex concavis crateribus craniorum
 Non gemit vir fortis contra mortem
 Magnifici in Odini domibus
 Non venio desperabundis
 Verbis ad Odini aulam.

IVXX.

XXVI.

Aslang's sons would soon draw nigh,
 With utmost swiftneſs hither fly,
 And arm'd with falchions gleaming bright
 Prepare the bitter deeds of fight,
 If told, or could they but divine
 What woe, what dire miſchance is mine.
 How many ſerpents round me hang,
 And tear my fleſh with poiſonous fang;
 A mother to my ſons I gave
 With native worth who ſtamp'd them brave.

XXVI.

Hic vellent nunc omnes
 Filii Aſlangæ gladiis
 Amarum bellum excitare
 Si exacte ſcirent
 Calamitates noſtras
 Quem non pauci angues
 Venenati me diſcerpunt
 Matrem accepi meis
 Filius ita ut corda valeant.

XXVII.

Fast to th' hereditary end,
 To my allotted goal I tend.
 Fix'd is the vipers mortal harm;
 Within my heart, his mansion warm,
 In the recesses of my breast
 The writhing snake hath form'd his nest.
 Yet Odin may in vengeance spread
 The bloody scourge o'er Ella's head,
 My son's fierce anger, at the tale,
 Shall change to red, from deadly pale.
 The fiery youths, at my decease,
 Shall starting shun the seat of peace.

XXVII.

Valde inclinatur ad hæreditatem
 Crudele stat nocumentum a vipera
 Anguis inhabitat aulam cordis
 Speramus alterius ad Othini
 Virgam in Ellæ sanguine
 Filiis meis livescet
 Sua ira rubescet

Non

Non acres juvenes
Sessioem tranquillam faciant.

XXVIII.

Full fifty times I trod the field,
My standard rear'd, and poised my shield,
War's willing guest; nor deem'd the force
Of human hand would check my course.
Panting to gain a matchless name,
And soar o'er every King in fame;
For well in earliest years I taught
My sword to drink the crimson draught.
The sisters now my steps invite;
Unmoved I quit the realms of light.

XXVIII.

Habeo quinquagies
Prælia sub signis facta
Ex belli invitatione et semel
Minime putavi hominum
Quod me futurus esset
Juvenis didici mucronem rubefacere
Aluis rex præstantior

Nos Afæ invitabunt nos

Non est lugenda mors.

XXIX.

Warn'd from within — break off the lay!
 Th' inviting Sisters chide my stay.
 By Odin sent, I hear their call,
 They bid me to his fatal hall,
 With them high-throned, the circling bowl
 Of foaming mead shall cheer my soul.
 With joy I yield my vital breath,
 And laugh in the last pangs of death.

XXIX.

Fert Animus finire

Invitant me Dyæ

Quas ex Othini aula

Othinus mihi misit

Lætus cerevisiam cum Afis

In summa sede bibam

Vitæ elapsæ sunt horæ

Ridens moriar.

11:7:49

F I N I S.